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FM THE WHITE HOUSE TOHAK 20

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FM: THE SITUATION ROOM

TO: GENERAL HAIG

HELM'S EXIT LINKED TO KISSINGER RIFT

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ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

THE IMPENDING RESIGNATION OF RICHARD M. HELMS AS THE NATION'S TOP INTELLIGENCE OFFICER CAN IN LARGE PART BE TRACED TO A SERIOUS AND CONTINUING POLICY DISAGREEMENT WITH HENRY A. KISSINGER, ACCORDING TO INFORMED SOURCES IN THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY.

THE DISAGREEMENT REPORTEDLY BEGAN WITH HELMS' POSITION IN 1969 ON A KEY INTELLIGENCE ISSUE - WHETHER THE SOVIET UNION, WITH ITS GIANT SS-9 MISSILE, WAS GOING FOR A "FIRST-STRIKE CAPABILITY," HELMS TOOK THE LESS ALARMED VIEW.

HELM'S DEPARTURE, WHICH HAS BEEN CONFIRMED BY AUTHORITATIVE SOURCES IN THE ADMINISTRATION, HAS NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED PUBLICLY PENDING A DECISION BY THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY HEAD TO ACCEPT ANOTHER POSITION

IT IS UNDERSTOOD THE NEW POSITION WILL INVOLVE THE FOREIGN
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POLICY FIELD AND WILL BE PRESENTED PUBLICLY AS A PROMOTION FOR
THE 59-YEAR-OLD HELMS, WHO HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN INTELLIGENCE
WORK EVER SINCE WORLD WAR II.

ROLE WAS EXPANDED

BUT INSIDERS ALREADY ARE VOICING SKEPTICISM THAT ANY JOB
OUTSIDE THE INTELLIGENCE FIELD COULD BE ANYTHING BUT A COMEDOWN
FOR HELMS, WHO IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN ANXIOUS TO STAY ON AS CIA
CHIEF.

A KEY ELEMENT IN THIS VIEW IS THE BELIEF WITHIN THE INTELLIGENCE
COMMUNITY THAT HELMS HAD LOST THE CONFIDENCE OF THE WHITE HOUSE-
KISSINGER ESPECIALLY.

"KISSINGER FELT THAT HELMS WASN'T SO MUCH TRYING TO SUPPORT THE
ADMINISTRATION AS PLAYING POLITICS ON HIS OWN-TRYING TO KEEP HIS
CONSTITUENCY TOGETHER IN THE INTELLIGENCE ESTABLISHMENT," ONE SOURCE
EXPLAINED.

IN ALL OUTWARD RESPECTS, HOWEVER, HELMS APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN
GIVEN PRESIDENT NIXON'S FULL CONFIDENCE, EXPRESSED BOTH IN PUBLIC
STATEMENTS AND IN HELM'S ASSIGNMENT JUST A YEAR AGO TO A POSITION
OF BROADENED RESPONSIBILITY IN INTELLIGENCE.

AS A RESULT OF A SWEEPING REORGANIZATION OF THE INTELLIGENCE
COMMUNITY IN NOVEMBER 1971, HELM'S OFFICIAL TITLE, DIRECTOR OF
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE, WAS EXPANDED TO INCLUDE NEW BUDGETARY AND
ORGANIZATIONAL AUTHORITY OVER THE WHOLE \$5 BILLION A YEAR U.S.
INTELLIGENCE EFFORT.

THE ORIGIN OF KISSINGER'S DISSATISFACTION WITH HELMS IS SAID
TO RESIDE IN AN INCIDENT, EARLY IN 1969, IN WHICH HELMS MADE AN
INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT INVOLVING A FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION ON
NATIONAL SECURITY THAT WAS SHARPLY AT ODDS WITH THE VIEW ADVANCED
BY PENTAGON INTELLIGENCE EXPERTS AND HELD PRIVATELY IN THE WHITE HOUSE.

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THE INCIDENT WAS ONE OF THOSE RARE OCCURENCES WHEN THE LATENT
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DISAGREEMENTS IN THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY SURFACED PUBLICLY,
IN THIS CASE IN THE PERSONS OF TWO RIVAL CHIEFTANS, HELMS HIMSELF
AND MELVIN R. LAIRD, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE.

AT ISSUE WERE THE MASSIVE SOVIET SS-9 INTERCONTINENTAL BALLISTIC
MISSILES, WHOSE EXISTENCE AS A NEW WEAPON IN THE SOVIET ARSENAL
BECAME KNOWN TO INTELLIGENCE EARLY IN THE ADMINISTRATION'S FIRST
YEAR.

LAIRD TESTIFIED BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
THAT THE NEW MISSILES, WHICH ARE CAPABLE OF CARRYING A MUCH HEAVIER
PAYLOAD THAN ANYTHING DEPLOYED PREVIOUSLY, MEANT THAT THE SOVIET
UNION WAS GOING FOR A "FIRST STRIKE CAPABILITY."

ABOUT THE SAME TIME, HELMS LET IT BE KNOWN THAT IN HIS ASSESSMENT
THE NEW MISSILES DID NOT INDICATE A SHIFT FROM THE TRADITIONAL
EMPAHSIS ON DEFENSE, AND THAT THE SMALLER MINUTEMAN-STYLE SS-11
WOULD REMAIN THE BACKBONE OF THE SOVIET STRATEGIC MISSILE ARSENAL.

JUDGEMENT WAS KEY

LATER, IN JUNE 1969, BOTH MEN APPEARED TOGETHER BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE IN EXECUTIVE SESSION, AND THEIR VIEWS WERE IN SOME PART
RECONCILED. HELMS IS SAID TO HAVE DEFERRED TO THE ADMINISTRATION
VIEW, WHICH WAS THAT THE PENTAGON INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT, CHAMPION-
ED BY LAIRD, WAS THE ONE ON WHICH TO BASE POLICY.

THE ADMINISTRATION HAS SUBSEQUENTLY BASED SOME OF ITS FUNDAMENTAL
DECISIONS IN THE NUCLEAR STRATEGY AND NATIONAL SECURITY FIELDS
UPON THAT INTELLIGENCE JUDGEMENT. THEY INCLUDE: ABM, WHETHER
TO GO AHEAD WITH RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIPLE MISSILE WARHEADS,
AND BASIC NEGOTIATING POSITIONS IN THE STRATEGIC ARMS CONTROL
TALKS WITH THE SOVIETS.

THE SOVIET UNION HAS NOW CLEARLY SHIFTED TO THE SS-9 AS ITS
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BASIC STRATEGIC WEAPON, AND IN THIS RESPECT HELM'S ASSESSMENT
APPEARS IN RETROSPECT TO HAVE BEEN WRONG.

ACCORDING TO INSIDERS, THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER LESS SPECTACULAR,
LIKEWISE INVOLVING AS ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CAPABILITY
IN WHICH HELMS AND THE PENTAGON WERE AT ODDS. IN MOST OF THESE,
SOURCES SAY, KISSINGER HAS SIDED WITH THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT.

THE LEADING CANDIDATE TO REPLACE HELMS IS AUTHORITATIVELY
REPORTED TO BE JAMES R. SCHLESINGER, CHAIRMAN OF THE ATOMIC ENERGY
COMMISSION, AND A CHIEF ARCHITECT OF A STUDY THAT SHAPED THE
INTELLIGENCE REORGANIZATION.

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